

***Iowa Outdoors***  
**Iowa Department of Natural Resources**  
**www.iowadnr.com**

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**Sept. 9, 2003**

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## **IOWA PHEASANT POPULATION AT 10-YEAR HIGH**

BOONE – The Iowa pheasant population increased by 40 percent over 2002 and is at its highest level since 1994. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources tracks pheasant numbers, along with other upland game, during a roadside survey, from August 1 to 15.

Todd Bogenschutz, wildlife biologist with the DNR, said the back to back mild winters benefited nearly every species in the survey, but particularly the pheasant population.

“The over winter survival of 2002 brood stock was excellent because of the lack of persistent snow cover last winter,” he said.

“Based on this year’s statewide population index, Iowa pheasant hunters should harvest between 1.18 and 1.38 million roosters this fall,” Bogenschutz said.

The better regions for pheasants are in northwest, north central and central Iowa. The northwest region had the highest pheasant count in the state averaging 83 birds per 30-mile route, the highest count in the northwest region since 1964. The north central region averaged 67 birds per route, the highest count since 1994, and the central region averaged 64 birds per route, its highest since 1980.

Pheasant numbers in east central, west central and southwest Iowa also had an increase in bird numbers. The east central region averaged nearly 37 birds per route and the west central region averaged 36 birds per route.

The pheasant population in southwest Iowa nearly doubled from the 2002 survey and averaged 29 birds per route. "With another good winter and spring in 2004, the southwest region pheasant population could return to its long-term average of 65 birds per route," Bogenschutz said.

The southeast, south central and northeast regions also had an increase in the pheasant population. In southeast Iowa, the pheasant count was up, but Bogenschutz said the increase was not found across the board. "Some routes had improved pheasant numbers, but others did not," he said.

The south central Iowa had a significant increase of nearly 73 percent over the 2002 survey. "This is the first time the south central region has had two consecutive springs with normal rainfall during the nesting period in more than a decade," Bogenschutz said.

The northeast region had an increase of 60 percent from the 2002 survey, but Bogenschutz said the counts varied from route to route.

"The northeast region experienced three consecutively poor years for winter and spring weather prior to 2002, and it will take another year of favorable winter-spring weather for pheasant populations to rebound to levels we are seeing in other northern regions," he said.

The August roadside survey also tracks the population of bobwhite quail, gray partridge, cottontail rabbit and white-tailed jackrabbit.

Bobwhite quail numbers improved 135 percent over the 2002 count, but remains well below the long-term average. "Iowa's quail population remains in a long-term decline," Bogenschutz said. "Changing land use, mainly intensified agriculture, is a leading factor in the decline. Only pockets of quail will likely be found across the southern three regions this fall."

The gray partridge counts were unchanged from 2002, averaging more than two birds per route. "Typically, partridge recruitment is highest in Iowa when precipitation is well below normal. Years with average to above average rainfall generally are not good for quail reproduction," he said.

The cottontail rabbit population is up 65 percent over 2002 and is the highest in 13 years.

The 2003 statewide jackrabbit index was unchanged from 2002. Jackrabbit numbers have declined over time with the loss of their preferred habitats - small grains, pasture and hayfields - in the northwest, north central, west central and central regions.

**For more information, contact Bogenschutz at 515-432-2823 or Lowell Washburn at 641-425-1023.**

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## **LATE SUMMER BASS FISHING**

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Just about everybody but the air conditioner sales guy is breathing a sweaty sigh of relief, as a cool front replaces the hot grip of August. On the water, too, the cooler temps trigger a pickup in fishing activity; sort of a preview of the fall feeding binge as fish get ready for Iowa's *other* weather extreme...an ice-locked winter.

A drop of a couple degrees can change where you catch fish, even what time of day. "They're going to start moving into the shoreline," predicts Paul Sleeper, fisheries biologist with the Department of Natural Resources. "Especially here at Lake Macbride where we have so much deep structure added (during the recent lake renovation). The game fish take advantage of that during hot weather. As the weather cools, they'll be in shallow, chasing crawdads and little fish. That makes them more accessible; not just the bass, but walleyes, too."

Still, Labor Day water temperatures were still 'summertime hot'. That's why Sleeper and his son, Wes, were casting crankbaits at the end of a rock pile, about eight feet down. Wes's pole bent double, and they watched the show from five yards away, as a big bass broke water several times, trying to throw the plastic crawdad. Once on board, the 19½-inch largemouth went 4.7 pounds; the largest bass Wes—and almost every other Macbride angler—had ever hooked.

Bigger than anything Greg Hall has caught on Macbride, too. Hall, of Iowa City, fishes bass tournaments through the year with his brother, Chris. With many of them falling through the summer, he's learned that hot weather bass fishing means going where the fish are. On lakes, that means morning or evening fishing in the shallows...but going deep during the day. "By midday, you're going to start losing that (shallow water) bite and the fish will go deep," says Hall. "A good 'deep' lure is a crankbait; a big lipped one, in a shad color really does well."

I caught up with the Halls late on one of those oven-like late August days. Despite the heat, they had been having a pretty good day and held on to a few in the live well; including a nice 3-pounder which Chris had hooked. "We caught all our fish on the rock

reefs. I really encouraging fishing there in hot weather,” urged Greg Hall. “The water temperature was 78 degrees today—81 at the surface—so the deeper rock structure did present the best opportunity.”

All of the day’s bass came on crankbaits—this time. Hall says, though, not to overlook tubes, lizards, crawdad or shad imitators. “Rock piles; pallet beds; anything down deep, yeah, fish are going to be eating crayfish or shad; anything along those lines.” He also recommends going with heavier weights; even ¼ ounce or higher, to get the jig down to the deeper, hot weather fish. And while ‘deep’ in Macbride might be eight to 10 or 12 feet, after it’s recent renovation, those same fish might be hanging in four to six feet in another lake. Look for the thermocline; the point where high oxygen and low oxygen water, as well as temperatures, stratify in summertime lakes. In Macbride, that is about 12 feet. In smaller lakes, it might be eight or 10 feet. Fish around structure close to that.

On the other hand, early or late fishing might send you to the shallows; as fish come into the more tolerable temperatures, to feed on insects and smaller baitfish. “Scum frogs; or any type of frogs work well early morning and evening,” suggests Hall. “Especially on the Mississippi or anyplace with a lot of vegetation; even a (three inch) torpedo works really well.”

When fishing for the freezer, most Iowa anglers would be hard-pressed to give up their favorite bluegill, catfish, crappie or walleye spots. For the pure fight, though, smallmouth and largemouth bass often get the nod. “The largemouth is a fish we have in abundance around here,” emphasizes Hall. “There are a lot of opportunities to catch them. They fight extremely hard and they are not extremely hard to catch.”

### **Catch and Release. Do It Right.**

Probably more than other Iowa fish; largemouth (and smallmouth) bass are prime ‘catch and release’ candidates. They are often the top predator in their environment. A certain number must remain—especially the bigger bass—to keep the overall fish population in balance. A good catch and release starts with a quick retrieve, to avoid tiring the fish. Once it is alongside your boat, handling is important. “You want to hold the fish parallel to your body; to avoid wear and tear on the jaw muscles,” explains bass angler Greg Hall. “That is how this fish eats. Too often, people hold that lip and the body hangs over it. If you hyperextend the jaw, that bass will have a hard time eating anything. Period.”

Another handling tip is to keep it ‘off the carpet’. Your boat deck covering might make it a little more comfortable for humans on board, but Hall notes that a fish flopping around on it loses its protective slime coat. Loss of that slime leaves the fish open to sometimes-fatal infection, when it is released.

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## **MARSH DEDICATION LAUNCHES LARRY WILSON LEGACY**

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

SPIRIT LAKE--Former Department of Natural Resources Director Larry Wilson was honored Saturday in a ceremony that dedicated the first in a series of prairie wetlands that will bear his name. Efforts to acquire the 700-acre marsh complex was spearheaded by members of Iowa Ducks Unlimited.

"I feel tremendously honored and, at the same time, humbled," Wilson told dozens of well wishers who assembled atop a grassy ridge overlooking one of the area's 30 prairie wetlands.

"A tremendous amount of work has gone into preserving these wetlands and I am so fortunate to be acknowledged in this way. For me, this has just been an incredible day."

But although Wilson seemed somewhat uncomfortable with the recognition bestowed by his peers, Ducks Unlimited project coordinator, Keith Helland was quick to note the accomplishments of the former DNR Chief.

"Larry served our state as DNR Director for a record 14 years," said Helland.

"During that time he gained a reputation for being a tireless crusader for waterfowl and wetlands conservation. He oversaw the creation the Prairie Pothole Joint Venture, the REAP program, and Iowa's private lands outreach. For all of us who benefit from Iowa wetlands and the rich diversity of wildlife they support, this tribute is a very fitting way of saying thank you to an outstanding leader."

According to Ducks Unlimited Senior Regional Director, Rock Bridges, the Wilson Legacy Marsh series will involve the acquisition and restoration of three separate wetland complexes located in the northern, western, and eastern regions of the state. The purpose of this distribution, said Bridges, is to make each project accessible to the greatest number of Iowans.

"It would be hard to overstate the benefits that the development of these wetlands will bring to our state," said Richard Bishop, chief of the DNR's wildlife bureau.

"In addition to providing countless recreational opportunities or critical breeding and migration habitat for waterfowl and a myriad of other wetland bird species, this area will also play a crucial role in enhancing the water quality of East Okoboji Lake.

"This complex once contained thirty separate marshes. Those basins are still there. The first thing we're going to do is go in and break every single tile line, and then we are going to bring that water to the surface. Every drop of water from 4,000 acres of watershed will be purified by these wetlands before entering Okoboji. That's going to

have a positive effect on water quality."

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## **POOL SLOUGH – IOWA’S NEWEST WILDLIFE REFUGE**

NEW ALBIN - Waterfowl hunters planning to travel to northeast Iowa this fall should be aware of a new refuge located in the far northeast corner of the state. The Pool Slough Wildlife Management Area, located in the northeast corner of Allamakee County, is situated on the floodplain of the Mississippi River, just east of New Albin.

New refuge regulations will be in effect for the fall duck and goose seasons. Hunters should take note that all state and federal land from the Army Road north to the Minnesota state line will be closed to waterfowl hunting. Also, on state land, a “No Shooting” zone extends 150 feet south of Army Road. This No Shooting Zone includes the road. Hunters and anglers may drive on Army Road to the boat landing and parking lot, but cannot trespass on the refuge portion of the Pool Slough area. This is an inviolate refuge, meaning that there is no trespassing in the area during the fall migratory waterfowl seasons. Dates will be posted along Army Road as you leave New Albin.

The Pool Slough Wildlife Management Area has always been a popular hunting and fishing area, but one of the problems has been low water levels during the fall. As areas dry up in the late summer and early fall, migrating ducks and geese are forced to look elsewhere for resting and feeding areas. The Pool Slough Habitat Rehabilitation and Enhancement Project in cooperation with the Army Corps of Engineers will begin later this fall. When it is finished, a more manageable source of water and improved waterfowl habitat will be realized. A dike system will be constructed north of Army Road that will provide improved habitat conditions.

The new refuge is being established to hold ducks and geese in the area. In the past, hunters would burn the ducks and geese off the area early in the day, and the birds would either return late in the evening or not at all. The refuge should provide an abundance of waterfowl food and a safe resting area. From Pool Slough, the next closest refuge along the Mississippi River is 20 miles south at Harpers Slough. The Iowa DNR has seen the need for a waterfowl refuge in the northern portion of Pool 9 for many years. Now that need will be met, and improved waterfowl habitat and waterfowl hunting opportunities will be realized.

For questions or more information, call Bob Kurtt, wildlife biologist at 563-382-4895 or Mike Griffin, wildlife biologist at 563-872-5700.

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## **NEED A HOME FOR YOUR ACORNS?**

Des Moines - Iowa's native oak trees drop millions of acorns each fall sending many central Iowa homeowners out – with rake in hand – to clear their yard. Instead of disposing or composting these acorns, consider donating them to the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

The DNR's State Forest Nursery, in Ames, will need up to 18 semi-truck loads of acorns to grow the 800,000 2-year old oak tree seedlings it hopes to have for planting in the spring of 2005, said John Walkowiak, chief of the DNR's forestry bureau.

"The State Forest Nursery grows more than 5 million tree and shrub seedlings each year for landowners to purchase at the cost of production for conservation plantings across our state. Oaks are some of the most popular trees ordered," he said.

The DNR has set up two acorn collection sites for homeowners in central Iowa to gather and donate their acorns. Two dog kennels have been loaned to the DNR by Lowe's Home Improvement of West Des Moines for acorn collection and storage.

The kennels are clearly marked DNR Acorn Collection Site. The first collection site is located downtown at the State Capitol Complex west parking lot near the State Historical Museum at the intersection of E. Locust Street and Pennsylvania Ave. The second collection site is located at the boat ramp parking lot of Raccoon River Regional Park, 2500 Grand Ave., in West Des Moines.

Walkowiak said people should place the acorns in paper sacks or boxes to keep them dry and should not to use plastic bags because plastic allows the acorns to heat up and become damaged.

"If at all possible, if people could separate out the different types of acorns and keep twigs and leaves out of the bags. It helps us at planting time this fall," he said. Walnuts are not needed, Walkowiak said, and people are asked not to drop them off at the acorn collection sites to avoid damaging the acorns.

Homeowners wishing to donate acorns can dropped them off anytime at these acorn collection sites between Sept. 8 and Oct. 1. For more information about acorns or the State Forest Nursery conservation seedlings, go to [www.iowadnr.com/forestry/](http://www.iowadnr.com/forestry/).

**For more information, contact Walkowiak at 515-242-5966.**

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## **CERTAIN STATE PARKS OFFER AMENITIES ALL YEAR LONG**

DES MOINES – A number of Iowa state parks have facilities open to the public all year long, including cabin and lodge rental and heated shower facilities.

“Some of these facilities can be difficult to reserve during the prime camping season but have open dates later in the year, if people are willing to be flexible with their schedule,” said Kevin Szcodronski, chief of the DNR’s parks bureau.

Cabins are available all year at Backbone, Pine Lake, Wilson Island and Springbrook state parks.

#### Backbone

The modern two-bedroom cabins are equipped with heating and air conditioning and available for year round rental. The one-bedroom style cabins, equipped with heating and air conditioning, are available through October. Renters must provide their own bedding and dinnerware. The cabins are available on a reservation basis through the park concessionaire and are accepted starting the first working day in January. Please call 563-933-4225 for cabin reservations.

#### Pine Lake

Four recently remodeled stone and timber cabins are nestled along the Iowa River. Built by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s, these cabins have fireplaces to take the chill off a cool fall day. "Pine Creek" and "Bittersweet" cabins accommodate up to 6 people, "Goldfinch" and "Sandstone" up to four. "Pine Creek" is accessible to the mobility-impaired. Each cabin features a shower, restroom, stove, and refrigerator. Cabin users must provide their own dishes, eating utensils, bedding, towels and other camping items. Cabins are available for reservation through the park concessionaire located at Twin Lakes Bait Shop, 23204 County Highway S56, Eldora, or call at 641-858-3626.

#### Wilson Island

A non-modern cabin is available year-round. The cabin has electricity, two bunk beds, a table and benches. No cooking, water, or sanitary facilities are furnished. The cabin is located near the campground shower and toilet building. Advance reservations are accepted starting the first working day in January. The cabin may be rented for a two-night minimum. Call 712-642-2069 for reservations.

#### Springbrook

Springbrook's six rustic family cabins provide great opportunities for an economical getaway. Available for weekly rental, the cabins will accommodate up to four people. They are equipped with refrigerators, stoves, water and flush toilets. Cabin users must provide their own bedding, towels, dishes and other camping items. Hot water is not available; however, showers are located in the campground. Cabins may be reserved for a week through the concessionaire after January 1. Call 641-747-2785 for reservations.

#### Honey Creek



There are 155 modern campsites with showers, rest rooms and a trailer dump station. Eighty sites are equipped with electricity only. Electricity is available year-round in the campground and the shower building is heated in the winter.

#### Lodges

The lodges at Walnut Woods, Lacey-Keosauqua and Wapsipinicon state parks are available for rent through the winter.

#### Walnut Woods

The popular lodge is an outstanding feature of the park. It is a beautiful setting for weddings, family reunions, holiday parties and business meetings. The lodge was built in the 1930s of limestone brought in from an eastern Iowa quarry and rough-cut hand-filled lumber. The lodge is available for rental on a reservation basis. Call 515-285-4502 for reservation information.

#### Wapsipinicon

There are two lodges, ideal for group events such as wedding receptions and family reunions, are available for rent through the park ranger. Both lodges include a stove, refrigerator, tables and running water. The newer lodge has a modern restroom and is available year-round. Call 319-462-2761 for reservation information.

#### Lacey-Keosauqua

A lodge may also be reserved through the park manager. The lodge is an excellent place for group events such as wedding receptions and family reunions. Call 319-293-3502 for reservation information.

**For more information, contact Szczodronski at 515-281-8674.**

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## **NATURAL RESOURCE COMMISSION TO MEET SEPT. 11 AT VIKING LAKE STATE PARK**

STANTON - The Natural Resource Commission (NRC) of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will meet at 8:30 a.m., Thursday, Sept. 11, at the Viking Lake State Park concession/restaurant building. Viking Lake is located four miles west of Stanton off Hwy. 34. The meeting is open to the public.

Commissioners and DNR staff will meet at the Super 8 Motel in Red Oak at 1 p.m., Sept. 10, for a tour of the area.

Members of the NRC are Joan Schneider, Randy Duncan, Paul Christiansen, Carol Kramer, William Sullivan, Richard Francisco and Janice Marcantonio. The DNR Director is Jeffrey Vonk.

The following is the agenda for the September meeting.

- Approve Agenda
- Approve Minutes of August 14
- Construction Projects
- Land Acquisition
  - Spring Run Wetland Complex, Dickinson County – Schmidt Trust
  - Union Hills Wildlife Management Area, Cerro Gordo County – Koethe
  - Sweet Marsh Wildlife Management Area, Bremer County – Sauerbrei
  - Middle River Wildlife Management Area, Warren County – INHF
  - Waubonsie State Park, Fremont County – Knapp Land Exchange
- Management Agreements
  - Lincoln Wildlife Area, Poweshiek County
  - Hitchcock Recreation Area, Cass County
- Fiscal Year 2005 Budget
- Conservation and Recreation Donations
- Notice of Intended Action – Chapter 61, State Parks and Recreation Areas
- Clay County Cabin Relocation – 28E Agreement
- Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund
- General Discussion
- Items for Next Meeting – Oct. 9, Decorah

**For more information, contact Karyn Stone at 515-281-8650.**

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